

IN THE SPECIFICATION:

Please replace the Summary of Invention section in paragraphs [0012] through [0016] with the following amended section:

--The present invention has been made in light of the above-described problems, and accordingly, it is an object thereof to perform difference image display such that observation of change in individual shadows can be made in an easy and sure manner even in the event that changes in shadows are occurring at multiple locations, and also to allow judgment of observation of the process to be made in an easy and sure manner.

It is another object of the present invention to provide a method and apparatus for generating consistent difference images even when generating difference images from negative and positive images intermingled, and particularly to provide a method and apparatus capable of outputting difference images with consistency in the display format of shadows on the difference image.

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According to the present invention, the foregoing objects are attained by providing an image processing method comprising: an input step, of inputting at least two medical images taken at different points in time; a difference image generating step, of generating a difference image by positioning two medical images input in the input step and subjecting image signals at corresponding coordinate points to difference processing; a difference image storing step, of storing the difference image generated in the difference image generating step in a storage medium; a reference difference value deciding step, of deciding a reference difference value in the difference image stored in the difference image storing step; a state selecting step, of allowing

a user to select a state of shadow change to serve as an indicator of interpreting the difference image generated in the difference image generating step; a difference image processing step, of processing the difference image based on the reference difference value decided in the reference difference value deciding step and the state of shadow change selected in the state selecting step; and an output step, of outputting the difference image processed in the difference image processing step.

Further, the foregoing objects are attained by providing an image processing method for generating a difference image from a first image and a second image, the method comprising: a control decision step, of deciding a gradient processing method such that shadow change regions are displayed in a predetermined manner based on image attributes of the first image and the second image whether to display a shadow change region of the difference image as a negative image or a positive image; a gradient an image processing step, of changing performing predetermined gradient processing on the first image and/or the second image following into the negative image or the positive image based on the decision of the control decision step; and a computing step, of computing a difference image from the first image and the second image processed changed in the gradient image processing step.

Further objects, features and advantages of the present invention will become apparent from the following description of the preferred embodiments with reference to the attached drawings.--